



# Manage Your Work, Manage Your Life

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**Abstract :** Work-life balance is about creating and maintaining supportive and healthy work environments, which will enable employees to have balance between work and personal responsibilities and thus strengthen employee loyalty and productivity. Today's workers have many competing responsibilities such as work, children, housework, volunteering, spouse and elderly parent care and this places stress on individuals, families and the communities in which they reside. Work-life conflict is a serious problem that impacts workers, their employers and communities. Work-life balance is essential to combat stress, ensuring both individual and company success. The stress associated with unbalanced lifestyles is costly; it damages productivity and increases individual health risks. Employees who have the tools to balance their professional and personal lives are happier, healthier, and more productive. In addition to improving performance, many younger employees place a high value on work-life balance. Companies that include work-life balance as part of their culture will be able to better attract qualified candidates.

**Key Words:** Work-life balance, productivity, culture, employee loyalty, stress, unbalanced lifestyles, health risks.

## I. INTRODUCTION:

Work-life balance is about creating and maintaining supportive and healthy work environments, which will enable employees to have balance between work and personal responsibilities and thus strengthen employee loyalty and productivity. Numerous studies have been conducted on work-life balance. Employees experience high levels of conflict between work and family, based on work-to-family interference and caregiver strain. If role overload is included, then close to 60 percent of employees surveyed experience work-family conflict of all the job factors that influence work-life conflict, the amount of time spent at work is the strongest and most consistent predictor. The higher levels of work-to-family conflict reported by managers or professionals often are a function of their longer work hours. Other reasons include: job security, support from one's supervisor, support from co-workers, work demands or overload, work-role conflict, work-role ambiguity, job dissatisfaction, and extensive use of communication technology that blurs the boundaries between home and work.

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and elderly parent care and this places stress on individuals, families and the communities in which they reside. Work-life conflict is a serious problem that impacts workers, their employers and communities.

It seems that this problem is increasing over time due to high female labour force participation rates, increasing numbers of single parent families, the predominance of the dual-earner family and emerging trends such as elder care. It is further exasperated with globalization, an aging population, and historically low unemployment.

## The Negative Effects of Work Life Conflict

Long work hours and highly stressful jobs not only hamper employees' ability to harmonize work and family life but also are associated with health risks, such as increased smoking and alcohol consumption, weight gain and depression. Work life conflict has been associated with numerous physical and mental health implications.

Women are more likely than men to report high levels of role overload and caregiver strain. This is because women devote more hours per week than men to non-work activities such as childcare, elder care and are more likely to have primary responsibility for unpaid labour such as domestic work. Furthermore, other studies show that women also experience less spousal support for their careers than their male counterparts. Although women report higher levels of work-family conflict than do men, the numbers of work-life conflict reported by men is increasing.

Employees, especially the younger generation who are faced with long hours, the expectations of 24/7 connection and increasing pressure of globalization are beginning to demand changes from their employers. Also, people in the elderly employee segment are working longer now than in the past and are demanding different work arrangements to accommodate their life style needs.

## Current Practices

Employers are becoming increasingly aware of the cost implications associated with over-worked employees such as: operating and productivity costs, absenteeism, punctuality, commitment and performance. There are five main reasons why companies participate in work

life balance programs: high return on investment, recruitment and retention of employees, legislation, costs and union regulations.

There are a wide variety of practices currently being used to help employees achieve work-life balance. It is important to note that some work-life balance programs help employees handle stress and otherwise cope more effectively while other programs help to reduce the absolute stress levels by rebalancing work life.

A growing number of employers have implemented wellness programs or pay for their employees' gym membership as part of a benefits package. Some companies invite fitness trainers or yoga instructors into the office to hold lunchtime sessions.

Some companies undertake initiatives to improve employees' healthy eating habits. Others offer stress management programs which include stretching, yoga, counseling, as well as bringing in Registered Massage Therapists to work.

Many employers are offering longer vacation times than the mandatory 2 weeks per year imposed by Canadian legislation. Additionally, some companies will offer "flex" days. Interestingly, sick days tend to go down once some is "entitled" to three weeks or more a year of holidays.

Human resources policies that can be used to increase work-life balance include implementing time off in lieu of overtime pay arrangements, providing a limited number of days of paid leave per year for child care, elder care or personal problems, or having policies around weekend and evening use of laptops and blackberrys.

There are some issues that arise when employees have flexible work hours such as lack of face-time with other staff and not being as available to clients; these issues can be solved by ensuring employees discuss scheduling with supervisor and let clients and other employees know their hours of availability.

Sometimes in order to accommodate workers need for work life balance, firms may need to reduce the amount of work given to each employee. To accomplish this, employers can hire new people, reduce time spent in job-related travel, allow for job sharing, or reevaluate the work itself and how it is structured and organized with work process improvements and/or reengineering of work.

Flexible scheduling is the benefit valued most by employees. However, increased flexibility, if implemented without conditions and used to facilitate business ends without provision for worker consent, could compromise instead of enhance work life balance.

#### **Why It's Important:**

A healthy balance between work and home should be a priority for everyone. Implementing proper work-life balance offers many important benefits. There are,

however, many hazards linked with an unbalanced work and home life.

#### **Risks:**

1. **Poor health:** Working long hours without taking time to relax will take its toll on health.
2. **Unresolved conflict:** A lack of balance can create conflicts at work and at home.
3. **Poor performance:** Taking on too much responsibility will lead to exhaustion and cause performance to suffer.
4. **Financial loss:** The impact on health and productivity takes a financial toll on both individual employees and organizations.

#### **Benefits:**

1. **Fulfillment:** People who successfully implement work life balance improve their sense of fulfillment at work and at home.
2. **Health:** A healthy work life balance decreases the risk of heart disease and other health problems.
3. **Greater productivity:** Being relaxed and well rested increases productivity and improves work performance.
4. **Stronger relationships:** Personal and professional relationships are strengthened and conflicts are avoided when there is work life balance.

#### **Symptoms of No Work Life In-Balance:**

**1. Exhaustion.** When you work long hours on a frequent basis and fail to establish boundaries between your work and home life, you end up suffering from physical and mental exhaustion. As a result, your ability to think clearly and your eye-hand coordination suffers. You are less productive and more prone to make mistakes. Your mind is fuzzy, your reflexes are slower, and you are at risk of injury, liability, and even tainting your professional reputation based on slow or ineffective performance.

**2. Absence.** When you fail to establish boundaries between your work and home life, you end up missing important family events. Not only are you not there for ballet recitals, baptisms, or soccer games, you also miss unique moments, anniversaries, and birthdays. Your absence can really damage your relationships with loved ones and make them feel unappreciated.

**3. No friendships.** By spending all of your time focused on your career, you don't dedicate any time to nurturing and growing your friendships. Friends are an essential element of your support system. They keep you from getting isolated as a result of high amounts of work and give you positive energy and support. Having a support system is key to having balance in your life, experiencing fulfillment, and having personal satisfaction in life. However, friendships need to be

nurtured. Otherwise, they don't last as long or their quality diminishes.

**4. Work load increase.** The more hours you work at the office and the more consistently you do it, the more work you will receive in compensation. You will get more responsibility and more projects. Now, while this may be a great step towards career advancement and a salary increase, you have to make sure it is not affecting the other aspects of your life. This is a slippery slope which can easily result in a never ending and increasing cycle of work, concerns, and pressures.

#### **14 Steps to Achieving Work-Life Balance:**

In today's busy world, prioritizing between your work and your personal life can be a huge challenge. But studies show that a poor work-life balance can result in unhealthy levels of stress, unhappiness, and even reduced productivity.

The 14 tips outlined in this article are designed to help you restore the balance -- and harmony -- in your work and personal lives, so you can enjoy both to the utmost.

#### **Step 1: Set your priorities**

Figure out what you want your priorities to be, not what you think they should be. Ask yourself, "If I could only focus on one thing in my life, what would it be?"

That answer is your top priority. What would you focus on second? Third? Fourth? Fifth? You've now identified your top five priorities.

#### **Step 2: Track your time**

For one week, track how you spend your time. How much time do you spend doing things that don't matter to you? Or that don't align with your priorities? Eliminate these things from your life, or delegate them.

#### **Step 3: Concentrate on one thing at a time**

Forget multi-tasking. It's not possible to focus on two things at the same time. Instead, devote your full attention to the task at hand. When you are working, work. When you are spending time with your family, focus solely on them.

#### **Step 4: Schedule one thing you look forward to each day**

Book some time to play tennis with a friend, go to an art museum, or have a massage. The activity doesn't have to be time-consuming, complicated, or expensive.

Put aside an hour on your schedule to read a book, take a walk, or just to be alone.

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#### **Step 5: Respect your private time**

An emergency would most likely have to come up before you'd reschedule an important work meeting. Give your own time the same respect.

Once you've put private time on your schedule, protect it, unless there's an emergency.

#### **Step 6: Take a look at your personal habits and general lifestyle**

Lack of sleep, poor nutrition, and bad exercise habits can cause you to feel a lack of balance in your life, and can counteract any efforts you are making to achieve work-life balance.

#### **Step 7: Take a vacation**

At the very least, take two weeks off from work per year. You don't need to go far and you don't need to spend lots of money, but you do need to recharge your batteries in order to be the most productive, creative, and happy person possible. Turn off your cell phone and computer, and enjoy.

#### **Step 8: Ask for support**

Tell your boss, family, friends, colleagues, and anyone else involved in your life that you are seeking a better work-life balance. Tell them what your plan is, and ask them to respect it.

#### **Step 9: Hire a personal coach**

A personal coach can assess your current work-life balance, and can tell you what you can do to achieve optimal balance.

#### **Step 10: Get plenty of exercise**

It may feel counterintuitive to add another activity to your life, but exercise relieves stress, clears your mind, and ultimately makes you more productive. Don't skip it. You'll find that you greet work, family, and personal commitments with renewed vigor.

#### **Step 11: Set boundaries**

Today's technology can make the line between your work life and personal life quite blurry. Turn off your cell phone and laptop when you're at your son's soccer game, and ask friends and family not to interrupt your workday unless it's an emergency.

#### **Step 12: Find a mentor**

Do you know someone who has it all -- a successful career and a terrific personal life? Ask him or her to give you advice on career development, setting priorities, and time management.

#### **Step 13: Learn how to say "no"**

Don't acquiesce to every request that comes your way. If it doesn't fit into your schedule or align with your priorities, don't overwhelm yourself by taking on more.

**Step 14: Evaluate your work-life balance on a regular basis**

Achieving work-life balance is a never-ending journey, and your needs will be different at different times in your life. Set aside some time once every other month or so to reflect on your current balance, what you would like it to be, and what the plan is for arriving there.

**CONCLUSION:**

Evidence suggests that improvements in people management practices, especially work time and work location flexibility, and the development of supportive managers, contribute to increased work-life balance. Work-life balance programs have been demonstrated to have an impact on employees in terms of recruitment, retention/turnover, commitment and satisfaction, absenteeism, productivity and accident rates.

Companies that have implemented work-life balance programs recognize that employee welfare affects the "bottom line" of the business. Parameters are required to ensure that programs are having the desired effect on both employees and the company. Six parameters that can be used to evaluate work life balance programs are: extent of management buy-in and training, how programs are communicated to employees, corporate culture, management controls, human resources policies and employee control.

Finally, self-management is important; people need to control their own behaviour and expectations regarding work-life balance.

**Lessons Learned:**

1. Defined work life balance.
2. Explored the risks of an unbalanced life.
3. Introduced employer resources for a balanced lifestyle.
4. Improved time management and goal setting.
5. Created balance at work and at home.
6. Managed stress at home and work

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